

Rumsfeld, or Bush, likely Ford choice for V-P spot

By Godfrey Sperling Jr.
Staff correspondent of
The Christian Science Monitor.

Washington
President Ford has narrowed his vice-presidential candidates down to two — Donald H. Rumsfeld and George W. Bush — and he has put them into prominent positions where either would be viewed as a logical choice for the No. 2 spot.

This evaluation comes from a Washington source who has for years had access to Mr. Ford's thinking on political issues.

"George Bush was Ford's original No. 2 choice, next to Rockefeller," this source says. "Then came Rumsfeld, close to Bush."

This informant was involved in the "screening" of Nelson A. Rockefeller before Mr. Ford named him Vice-President. He checked with GOP leaders around the United States and found there would be no serious objection raised to such an appointment.

However, a White House source, who agrees with the thesis that Mr. Ford probably would give these two men the "first look" when he gets around to naming his running mate, sees Mr. Rumsfeld as more likely to get the nod than Mr. Bush.

This source contends that Rumsfeld, not Bush, was the next man on President Ford's list for the vice-presidential selection, after Rockefeller, and that Bush was third.

In 1972, when Congressman Gerald Ford was part of an effort to displace former Vice-President Spiro T. Agnew on the national ticket, he let it be known that his first choice then was Rockefeller and his second choice Rumsfeld.

Mr. Ford and Mr. Rumsfeld have come even closer together during the last year in their President-chief of staff relationship. Hence speculation that gives the new Secretary of Defense the inside track on the vice-presidency, with the new head of the CIA a close second.

Sources here also say that Elliot L. Richardson has moved one step closer to "higher things" by accepting the Commerce Secretary slot. But they contend that Mr. Richardson is being groomed for secretary-of-state service — not the vice-presidency.

Mr. Richardson, it seems, might alienate some of the very people that were most unhappy about Nelson Rockefeller — the conservatives.

George Bush, as GOP national chairman, steered a careful course of loyalty to Richard Nixon, even though he was known to hold private misgivings about Mr. Nixon's deportment in Watergate.

He might be the preference for vice-president among the conservative-oriented Nixon loyalists — over Mr. Rumsfeld who is viewed by many Republicans as a "moderate."

Where does Ronald Reagan fit into all this? The implication in the opening up of the vice-presidential slot by Mr. Rockefeller's announcement is that a Ford-Reagan ticket now is a possibility.

Perhaps. But not too likely, as seen here. Mr. Reagan already has said he is not interested in being Mr. Ford's running mate. And while he doesn't say so — and will not until the last minute — the President's own preferences lie elsewhere.

The outcome of primary contests between Messrs. Ford and Reagan could cause both men to revise their views on a Reagan vice-presidential slating.